



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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SRS Leads DOE Complex in EPA's Superfund Job Training Initiative

Superfund Trainees Defy Circumstances To Gain Recovery Act Jobs

AIKEN, S.C. (Sept. 2) — A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program is being implemented for the first time in the U.S. Department of Energy Complex at the Savannah River Site (SRS). The program builds a foundation for hope and a brighter future for the program's men and women who will begin their careers as Recovery Act workers.

The Superfund Job Training Initiative (SuperJTI) Program was developed by the EPA to provide disadvantaged adults with the job skills necessary to work at a Superfund site. Superfund sites are designated for significant clean up. Typically, these locations are abandoned hazardous waste sites or sites in need of specialized remediation. Through an agreement between the EPA and the DOE's Environmental Justice Program, members of the first class of SuperJTI trainees at SRS are headed for Recovery Act projects.

The SuperJTI Program at SRS began in January with a five-month recruitment period. Stakeholder meetings were held in Allendale, Barnwell and Aiken counties in South Carolina and Augusta, Ga. In all, 500 people expressed interest in participating in the program. Screening and testing reduced the number to 90. From there, the 90 applicants underwent six weeks of screening and testing, followed by pre-employment aptitude examinations.

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Candidates recruited for the program were residents of economically depressed rural areas neighboring SRS. Some of these communities currently suffer from some of the nation's highest unemployment rates. Many of those recruited from these areas were additionally challenged by a lack of role models engaged in technical or professional-fields.

"There was a special effort to reach a group of people who were on the fringe. For most, their futures likely did not include enrolling in technical schools or colleges," explained Barbara Smoak, with Education Outreach Programs at Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, LLC (SRNS), the company responsible for the management and operations of SRS for the DOE.

De'Lisa Bratcher, Environmental Justice Program Manager for DOE-Savannah River, said she was touched, time after time, by heart-wrenching stories. "It was very painful to go through the process to choose the candidates who would enter the program because there were so many good-hearted people," she said. "It was hard work. We went over each person's application multiple times. After being with these people for several days, we had the sobering responsibility of selecting those who had the best opportunity to complete the program."

The 90 semifinalists were reduced to a group of 21, and ultimately to 19 men and women ranging in age from 20 to 52.

Ned Baynham, who handles nonexempt staffing for SRNS, said the finalists underwent a six-week training period that included math classes and technical training at Aiken Technical College. Additional courses included life skills, physical fitness training and clinical observations of their attitudes to determine leadership potential and their overall employee temperament. Participants also received first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and hazardous operator worker training.

"Every one who passed the screening and met the criteria were selected for appointments to Recovery Act projects by SRNS," Smoak said. Job offers were made to 16 candidates and will be made to three more pending their passing scores on the General Educational Development (GED) test, which Baynham expects soon.

The SuperJTI Program has given participants a sense of accomplishment. When asked about their life's proudest moment, many responded that completing the project was their greatest achievement thus far. Smoak related one example of a father from Barnwell who had lost his job and struggled to take care of his three children before finding the support of the program. "It was a humbling experience to go through this," Smoak added. "Life had beaten many of them down."

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Those who have completed the program have reached a milestone in their lives. They are now undergoing final orientation training before going to work at SRS as production operators or material handlers on Recovery Act projects. Unlike other Recovery Act workers who can expect to be on the job market again at the conclusion of the projects in September 2011, SRNS plans something else for Super JTI graduates. Those who successfully complete their Recovery Act assignments will be assigned to permanent status as SRNS full-time employees.

“It is a huge EPA-DOE success story,” Smoak continued. “SRS is the first DOE site to implement the program; it’s a new initiative, a pilot program. Everyone regards this program as a major success.”

Bratcher is especially proud of the Savannah River Site. “We are a model for the complex,” Bratcher observed. Executive Order 12898 mandates federal actions to address environmental justice in minority populations and low-income populations. It requires federal agencies to make environmental justice part of their missions by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.”

For those entering their new careers, SRNS is proud of their achievements and awaits their contributions as members of the Recovery Act workforce. The effort was worth the effort and fulfills the spirit of the Recovery Act for the Central Savannah River Area.

For additional information on the Department of Energy’s Office of Environmental Management and the Savannah River Site, can be found at <http://www.em.doe.gov> or <http://www.srs.gov>. Follow SRS news on twitter also: www.twitter.com/SRSNews.

For more information about the SRS Recovery Act Project, please visit www.srs.gov/recovery.

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